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ABSTRACT

Volunteers assume a wide variety of responsibilities in community organizations. In service-oriented activities, adult and community educators make extensive use of volunteers, asking them to fulfill a number of roles and giving them such responsibilities as tutoring, counseling, problem solving, and decision making. Issue- or cause-oriented activities seek volunteers who work to make community agencies and individuals aware of a need for social and community change. Knowing why people volunteer their time and talents is important to understanding volunteer motivation and involvement. They volunteer to help other people, to benefit society, to use socializing skills, to develop or maintain personal development skills, and for employment-related motives. Recruitment of volunteers should be done with a major campaign to address the needs of the agency, the needs of the volunteer, and the needs of the director. A job description should be presented to the applicant, and an effective training program should be developed and implemented. Adult education principles are helpful in developing meaningful, effective training programs. Retention is best accomplished through the development of feelings of importance and belonging. Rewards and recognition are also important to volunteers. (12 references) (YLB)

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VOLUNTEERS ENHANCE THE QUALITY OF LIFE IN A COMMUNITY. . .

OR

(HOW TO GET THEM, TRAIN THEM AND KEEP THEM)

A PRESENTATION GIVEN AT THE 1990 AAACE CONFERENCE
SALT LAKE CITY, UTAH – OCTOBER 28 - NOVEMBER 2, 1990

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Volunteers Enhance The Quality of Life In A Community
Or
(How To Get Them, Train Them and Keep Them)

In no country in the world has the principle of association been more successfully used or applied to a greater multitude of objects than in America. Besides the permanent associations which are established by law . . . a vast number of others are formed and maintained by the agency of primary individuals . . . . In the United States, associations are established to promote the public safety, commerce, industry, morality and religion. There is no end which the human will despairs of attaining through the combined power of individuals united in a society.

(Alexis de Tocqueville -- Democracy In America.)

OVERVIEW OF VOLUNTARISM

Try to imagine a city without civic or community leaders. Think of the social climate of a community that doesn't have Scout programs, help for the needy, services for seniors, child care centers, counseling and rehabilitation programs for those who are in need. Voluntarism and community leadership are services which are needed desperately -- especially with today's inflation making everything so expensive and with the finite limits accorded to human, environmental and financial resources.

"Historically community education has included volunteers and promoted the notion of volunteers because there was so much work and limited human & financial resources. The Indiana state plan for community education professes the right citizens have to be involved in determining community needs, identifying community resources, and linking those needs and resources to improve their communities."

(1989 Indiana State Plan for Community Education p. 3)

Many social and community agencies and other providers of human services expand or extend their services through the work of volunteers. In fact some organizations would not be able to provide services at all without them.

"Voluntarism represents a uniquely American tradition of citizen participation in community affairs. Indeed, our nation's history is replete with examples of individual vigor and idealism mobilized within the structure of volunteer organizations and associations for the purpose of improving the quality of life within the American society." (Former IN Gov. & Sect. of Human Services, Otis R. Bowen, MD - 1982)

Isley (1989) defines a volunteer as someone who chooses to commit him or her self to a cause or to others in a deliberate spirit of service. This service is offered in response to one or more perceived social needs, often within an organizational context, in return for more intrinsic benefits.

THE NEED FOR VOLUNTEERS

Voluntarism embodies a spirit of willingness (even eagerness) on the part of volunteers to contribute their time, talents, and energies without pay. There often is a strong willingness on the part of paid personnel to collaborate with volunteers on special projects.

The mission of a volunteer, according to Isley (1989), begins with a strong commitment to an agency or organization, often without any type of binding agreement, but soon develops into a loyalty stronger than any written document. The volunteer does not think in terms of sacrifice but instead sees rewards that go beyond the financial. However volunteers sacrifice much, in terms of time spent and energies given to a project. Because of this, successful volunteer experience hinges on the mutual satisfaction of meeting volunteer and organizational needs. (Handbook of adult and continuing education p. 103).

Volunteers assume a wide variety of responsibilities in community organizations. They provide direct services to clients. They perform both clerical and administrative tasks. They contribute their public relations, fund-raising and grant writing talents. They often serve as policy makers as board directors and advisers

THE ROLES OF VOLUNTEERS

According to David Horton Smith (1981), a leading author in the field of voluntarism, the many types of activities in which volunteers engage themselves include:

1) Service-oriented activities
2) Issue- or cause- oriented activities
3) Activities for self-expression - such as sport groups, dinner clubs
4) Activities for occupation and economic self-interest, such as professional groups and unions, and
5) Activities for philanthropic and fund raising purposes.

In service-oriented activities, adult and community educators make extensive use of volunteers, asking them to fulfill a number of roles and giving them such responsibilities as tutoring, counseling, problem-solving and decision-making.

Issue-oriented or cause-oriented activities- - often called advocacy voluntarism -- seek volunteers who work to make community agencies and individuals aware of a need for social and community change. In both cases, volunteer commitment is based largely on a real sense of duty associated with improving life for one's fellow human beings, the community, and the environment. Dedicated participation also results in enriching one's own life.

For whom do they volunteer and what do they do? Volunteers work in settings such as health, education, and religious organizations. They participate in social services, community action programs, recreation, arts and culture, business and

political organizations. They assist the disabled, tutor illiterate adults, raise funds for local organizations, and teach Sunday school. They serve on boards & committees, participate in political campaigns, and lead recreational activities. They drive people from one place to another, answer phones and stuff envelopes. The list of volunteer activities is endless. (Isley, Handbook of adult and continuing education p.104).

EXAMPLES OF VOLUNTEER PROGRAMS

Without the volunteer contingent, many community-based programs in Indiana would have to severely curtail their activities or cease functioning entirely. In Floyd County, Indiana, an Alcohol and Drug Task Force coordinates community - wide efforts to address the problems of substance abuse. These endeavors, which require linkages with public and private organizations, involve hundreds of volunteers in all stages of the planning process. Similar programs have been initiated throughout the state in response to the Governor's Commission for a Drug-Free Indiana.

Volunteers in Warsaw, Indiana, began a Latchkey Program to provide a safe, after-school environment for children from three elementary schools. Goals mushroomed through the efforts of volunteers and the local United Way into an enrichment program which involves volunteers in providing bus transportation, field trips, speech and physical therapy, health screening and staff inservices.

In South Bend, Indiana, a program known as Pathfinders makes use of volunteer adults and college students in tutoring at-risk high school students. Their coordinated efforts have significantly reduced the drop-out rate at Washington High School.

Lafayette, Indiana's Adult Reading Academy uses more than 100 volunteers to

offer academic and social services to 800 learners per year. Volunteers act as tutors and instructional aides, but they also work to establish the interagency cooperation and public awareness components that are integral to this program for adult literacy.

These are but a few examples of the myriad ways in which volunteers function in the thousands of programs which need their help to exist.

According to the Gallup Polls taken in 1981 and again in 1985, the ratio of female to male volunteers leveled out -- 55% women to 45% men. A second important trend was the increased participation of young adults aged eighteen to twenty-four years. Although there was an increase in urban volunteers, those from middle-income households ($20,000 - $39,000) declined. It is encouraging that senior citizens increased both participation and the scope of activities for which they volunteer.

The 1985 Gallup Statistics revealed that approximately one in every four Americans over the age of fourteen volunteered; nearly 50 percent put in three or more hours per week, while 20 percent logged more than six or more hours. Those figures roughly translate into a staggering 170 million volunteer hours per week and close to nine billion hours per year in North America.

MOTIVATING AND RETAINING VOLUNTEERS

Knowing why people volunteer their time and talents is important to understanding volunteer motivation and involvement. People who volunteer often do so because they were asked directly by their spouse, a friend or colleagues. Twenty-nine (29%) percent volunteer because a family member or loved one was involved or participated in the project. Thirty-one (31%) percent volunteered because they

belonged to a group which participated in a voluntary project. Only six (6%) percent volunteered due to a newspaper advertisement or media information request for volunteers.

The 1987 VOLUNTEER SURVEY, conducted by The National Center, revealed that the majority (97%) of people who volunteer do so because they want to help others, because they enjoy the work (93%), and because they are personally interested in the specific work or cause (89%) for which they volunteer their services. A smaller but still significant number of people volunteered as the result of a feeling of civic or social responsibility (76%), to fill free time (41%) or to make new friends (40%). It is interesting to note that while 59% reported volunteering because someone asked them to do so, only 14% of volunteer participation was due to encouragement by employers.

The major reasons which respondents gave for not volunteering were lack of time (79%) and concern that they might be unable to honor the commitment (40%). These reasons correlate with another facet of the 1987 VOLUNTEER study in which 79% of nonvolunteers reported that short-term assignments would be the most important incentive to their participation. While only 8% of respondents were nonvolunteers because they felt they lacked the necessary skills, 70% reported that training was an important incentive for participation. This survey also suggested that volunteer involvement might be increased if programs provide daycare, transportation to the job, reimbursement for expenses, and activities in which volunteers can involve their families or friends.

Voluntarism is tied to the identities of people where they live, where they work, what they do on their jobs, and what their interests are outside of their regular jobs. Cyril Houle, respected adult educator and researcher, pictured a triangle of three types of volunteer commitment. Ten percent were deeply committed to a task, program or cause. Twenty to thirty percent participated actively and regularly in causes or programs. Sixty to seventy percent volunteered because of a special event. This third group was not considered apathetic -- the participants wanted only to volunteer or participate in one special event or program.

But there are other points of view regarding motivation and service of volunteers. Lynch (1984) discovered that people volunteer for many reasons other than helping other people. The major reasons listed were not necessarily in order of importance.

A. GOOD OF SOCIETY: Reasons previously given and discussed.

B. SOCIALIZING SKILLS:

1) To "get out of the house" or to escape boredom.
2) To make or meet new friends.
3) To be with old friends who volunteer at the particular agency.
4) To gain knowledge about the problems of the community.
5) To spend "quality time" with some members of their family by volunteering together.

C. PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT SKILLS:

1) To make a transition from prison or a previous unpleasant experience.
2) To maintain skills that they would otherwise no longer use.

D. EMPLOYMENT RELATED MOTIVES:

1) To get to know important people in the community.

2) To gain new skills for a future paid position.
3) To impress their present employers for potential promotions within their companies.
4) To gain status or prestige by belonging to a "certain" or "special" group.

The primary reasons then, for volunteering are for the good of the community and society and for self-enhancement benefits.

RECRUITING, TRAINING, & RETAINING VOLUNTEERS

Recruitment of volunteers should be done with a major campaign to address the needs of the agency, the needs of the volunteer and the needs of the director. When recruiting volunteers it is helpful to present a job description to the applicant at the first meeting. Objectives should be specifically outlined as to the task, duration, duties, and meaning of the voluntary activity. When training volunteers, one should never assume that they know everything they will need to know about the agency. Everyone needs a good orientation or training program. In order to design a meaningful volunteer training program, **three** important questions should be raised:

1) What knowledge, skills, and abilities does a volunteer need to perform the assignment? Which of these requires further training and orientation?

2) What kinds of skills does the program director or leader want this training session to produce? What are some manageable outcomes to be realized?

3) What kinds of individual learning experiences can be produced in the training sessions that will give the volunteer the opportunity to practice and to develop those skills and perhaps reduce anxiety about the job?

Donald Plambeck (1985), Director of the National Academy of Voluntarism, suggested the following approaches for developing an effective training program.

1) Work with smaller groups. While you can get 90 or 100 people to listen to three or four hours of lectures and get the training over within one day, they probably have not really been trained, but just talked to. Smaller groups of twenty or thirty people can give you the opportunity to open up discussions and develop individual learning experiences. Also, small groups help to develop a sense of belonging.

2) Use volunteers from previous years as trainers, coaches, and mentors for the new volunteers. Experienced volunteers can be excellent in role-playing situations because they have heard and handled many of the problems and responsibilities. These mentors can offer a great deal of credibility to a program or project -- they have been there before.

3) A quick self-scoring test on the facts about the agency can be a good "ice breaker" and can motivate the participants to learn more about the agency; however, the test should be short: 20 items or less.

4) Allow time to practice role-playing or simulations where volunteers would be allowed to try out new knowledge and skills in a neutral atmosphere. Rotate the roles with a participant observer as an interested spectator to provide observations after the session is concluded. New volunteers could receive feedback and coaching for a more effective performance after the session.

5) Divide those volunteers being trained into groups of six or seven and have them develop lists of problems they anticipate, questions for which they want answers and potential difficulties. Discuss the items of importance on the lists and have them determine the appropriate answers. Previous volunteers can be used as good resource people in the discussions and in the training sessions.

6) Work to increase the level of motivation throughout the session. Adult educator Raymond Wlodkowski (1985) said that teachers must pay attention to motivational needs from the inception of a program and throughout its duration, not just at the end of the learning experience.

ADULT EDUCATION TECHNIQUES SUGGESTED FOR TRAINING

Understanding the ways adults learn also helps in developing meaningful, effective training programs. Several adult education principles are suggested:

- Adults have a strong desire to learn. Discover what each learner's interests are formally and informally before the training begins.

- Adults will learn only when they feel a need to learn.

- Adults learn by doing, by practice, and by receiving constructive feedback, reinforcement and direction.

- Problem-solving skills and dealing with realistic situations works best for adults.

- Previous experience has a significant effect upon adult learning, and can be both positive and negative.

- Involve adults in informal and comfortable environments to foster learning.

- Use a variety of instructional methods when teaching adults

- Use questions of all types as teaching strategies; to stimulate, to recall factual information, to draw implications, and make value judgments.

- Use "spaced practice sessions" to facilitate remembering skills or principles. Have the practices include both verbal and image rehearsals, depending on the nature of the task.

- Use descriptive feedback and reinforcement for participants. Compliment them specifically on tasks rather than merely praising them for a "job well done".

- Use the 'teachable moment" strategy - build on important situations or trial cases.

- Assist each participant to evaluate his or her progress -- everyone likes to know how he or she is doing.

- Meet the social needs of the group. Use coffee breaks often. Schedule an outing to celebrate the training completion.

- Adults want guidance, encouragement, and suggestions, not grades.

THE KEY TO VOLUNTEERS IS NOT TO "USE THEM" BUT TO UTILIZE THEIR TIME, TALENTS, AND SKILLS THROUGH MEANINGFUL TRAINING

Retention of volunteers is best accomplished through the development of feelings of importance and belonging to a particular agency. If the volunteer's role is

not perceived as being of value to the operation of the agency, the longevity of those services to the agency will be shortened.

REWARDING & RECOGNIZING VOLUNTEERS

Recruiting, orienting and training volunteer workers to their jobs are not sufficient conditions for the successful maintenance of a volunteer program. Volunteers are the same as paid staff: they require and benefit from regular inservice training. Perhaps the greatest benefit obtained from such training is the continued reinforcement provided when volunteers are reassured of the value of their services to the agency's program. Regular monthly meetings in which volunteers and staff can meet and confer, monthly newsletters with pictures and photos which highlight the activities of volunteers, and other means of communication are extremely valuable. Much of this value accrues when volunteers are included in regular inservice meetings, seminars and workshops designed for the paid staff. Certainly, a sense of belonging -- an affiliation -- can thus be fostered, which further serves to solidify the volunteer workers and reaffirms their value as part of the staff. Recognition nights, posters, pins, pictures, letters of support and appreciation and other suggestions help to emphasize the roles of volunteers as important and integral parts of the agency or organization. Resources like volunteers are scarce, valuable and limited and should be treated as such.

It is best to utilize the volunteer's time, talents, and skills wisely and well. Through careful planning, effective recruiting, ongoing training and adequate recognition, volunteers can realize their full potentials. Treat volunteers in the same way as paid staff and reward them often and well. Volunteers are the community's best resources.

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